



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

August 29, 2008

Mr. John A. Kelly  
Chairman  
Advisory Committee on Cemeteries  
and Memorials  
3645 Kanawha Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20015

Dear Mr. Kelly:

Thank you for the recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials' April 2008 meeting held in West Palm Beach, Florida. I appreciate the work that the Committee has done to assist the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding its memorial affairs program.

Enclosed is VA's response to the Committee's recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James B. Peake", is written over a horizontal line.

James B. Peake, M.D.

Enclosure

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA) RESPONSE TO THE  
APRIL 29-30, 2008  
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CEMETERIES AND MEMORIALS**

- 1. The Advisory Committee requests the opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft VA Burial Benefits Program Evaluation and if feasible for the authors to conduct outreach to the Committee.**

VA appreciates the work that the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials has done by providing thoughtful and valuable input to the Burial Benefits Program Evaluation. Committee members participated in stakeholder sessions as the contract Statement of Work was developed and with the Program Evaluation contractor, Caliber/ICF, as part of the analysis plan development. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) will brief the Committee on the report, its findings and recommendations after the report is finalized. VA looks forward to continuing to work with the Committee in the future and considers the Committee's continued interest and input regarding these findings and recommendations of value in assisting NCA to make informed decisions regarding memorial benefits.

- 2. The Advisory Committee urges NCA to contact the "Trust for Public Lands" to study strategic opportunities to purchase land for future national cemeteries.**

NCA recognizes the importance of developing a proactive strategy to purchase land for future national cemeteries and to ensure the continuation of national cemeteries currently in service. Any entity that can assist NCA in purchasing available property for future national cemeteries is welcomed.

NCA is developing a list of site needs to determine which cemeteries have immediate, short term and long term acquisition needs. After NCA has developed the list, it would be appropriate to contact the Trust for Public Lands for any assistance that it can provide and to see if any public land is available to meet NCA's goals.

Additionally, NCA's senior managers are exploring alternatives to expand the pool of available properties and enhance site analyses prior to purchase. For example, our fiscal year 2009 budget request includes \$5 million for a new Land Acquisition line item that will allow greater flexibility in the purchase of land when it becomes available.

3. **That NCA develop a Public Service Announcement (PSA) regarding burial benefits that may be used to highlight memorial benefits where new national cemetery dedication ceremonies are taking place.**

VA restrictions on advertising were lifted on June 16, 2008. The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs may now purchase advertising in media outlets to promote awareness of benefits and services in coordination with the Department's Office of Public Affairs (OPIA). OPIA is evaluating the possibility of a PSA/Advertising campaign through a partnership with the Ad Council and the possibility of hiring contractors to develop a VA benefits PSA campaign. NCA will coordinate with OPIA to incorporate memorial benefits into any overall OPIA PSA/Advertising campaign.

4. **That VA, through an award from the Sec VA, acknowledges Worchester Wreath Company for their philanthropic efforts in organizing their Wreaths Across America (WAA) program. Additionally, that all VA national cemeteries support and participate in Wreaths Across America.**

VA agrees that the Wreaths Across America program has promoted volunteerism and goodwill, and raised awareness of veterans, NCA, and VA. The Department will consider appropriate ways to recognize the Worchester Wreath Company for the program. All VA national cemeteries currently participate in WAA. Each VA national cemetery has a WAA ceremony and prepares a media advisory and news release to generate public and media interest.